

THE
SHADOW

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EDEN PHILLPOTTS



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THE SHADOW

BY THE SAME
AUTHOR



THE SECRET WOMAN
THE MOTHER
DOWN DARTMOOR WAY
CURTAIN RAISERS
A BREEZY MORNING
ETC. ETC.

THE SHADOW

(A PLAY IN THREE ACTS)

BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

LONDON

DUCKWORTH AND CO.

HENRIETTA ST. COVENT GARDEN

1913

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PRINTED AT
THE BALLANTYNE PRESS
LONDON

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CHARACTERS

WILLES GAY, *a butcher.* Aged 45.

THOMAS TURTLE, *a postmaster.* Aged 60.

PHILIP BLANCHARD, WILLES GAY'S *man.* Aged 28.

ELIAS WAYCOTT, *a gamekeeper.* Aged 30.

JOHNNY SLOCOMBE, *a boy.* Aged 12.

SARAH DUNNYBRIG. Aged 60.

HESTER DUNNYBRIG, *her daughter.* Aged 25.

NANNY COAKER, *a poacher's wife.* Aged 40.

*The scene is laid at Little Silrer, a village on the edge of
Dartmoor.*

628473

CAST OF THE FIRST PERFORMANCE OF
THE SHADOW
AT THE GAIETY THEATRE, MANCHESTER,
OCTOBER 6, 1913

PRODUCED BY LEWIS CASSON

WILLES GAY	PERCY FOSTER
THOMAS TURTLE	BREMER WILLS
PHILIP BLANCHARD	JULIUS SHAW
ELIAS WAYCOTT	BERNARD COPPING
JOHNNY SLOCOMBE	TOMMY NICKSON
SARAH DUNNYBRIG	LUCY BEAUMONT
HESTER DUNNYBRIG	SYBIL THORNDIKE
NANNY COAKER	MARY BYRON

ACT I

SCENE: *The little general shop of Sarah Dunnybrig at Little Silver, Dartmoor. A counter runs across the midst of the shop, and behind it are shelves divided by a glazed door with a curtain over the lower panes. To the right of the door the shelves contain bottles of sweet stuff, boxes of chocolate and tins of biscuits. There are also on the counter bottles of ginger beer and groceries—butter, cheese, a piece of bacon, a box of bloaters, and a basket of eggs. To the left of the door the shelves hold bales of cloth and boxes of haberdashery. Hanging on strings across the shop are bright kerchiefs, pieces of lace, straw hats and stockings. Gay print stuffs are displayed, with ties, men's braces and linen shirts. Beyond the groceries, to the left, is disposed hardware stock and ironmongery. Here are spades, scythes, billhooks, carpenter's tools, hedgers' gloves, brooms, a mangle and other things, including a card of the bright brass decorations that cart-horses wear on their harness, and cards of knives. In front of the counter, on the ground, are one or two open bays of flour, peas and grain, and upon the counter stands a large pair of scales*

with weights. Advertisements of chocolate, dog-biscuit, wholemeal flour, chicken food and so forth hang where they can be displayed to advantage. There are one or two broad-sheets of sales of stock, and the poster of a coming circus hanging from the counter. In large letters on a paper scroll hanging across the shop, where all customers can read, are painted the words, "IF YOU DON'T SEE WHAT YOU WANT ASK FOR IT." At the left end of the counter is a hatch thrown open and giving access from behind the counter into the shop. There is a door opening into the shop from the street. The upper half is glazed and a bell is fastened to it, which rings when the door is opened.

[The bell rings and NANNY COAKER enters. She looks round cautiously, but nobody answers the summons. She keeps her eye on the door behind counter, and slips a few biscuits into her pocket. Then she hammers upon the counter with a coin which she holds.

NANNY. Shop! Shop!

[Enter, from door behind counter, SARAH DUNNYBRIG.

SARAH. *[Sleepily.]* If I wasn't having forty winks, Nanny Coaker! I hope I haven't wasted your time?

NANNY. No, no. I ain't been here a second. My husband's home again.

SARAH. Has he come out in a Christian spirit?

NANNY. No, he ain't; and more would you if they'd

given you a month's hard for stealing pheasants what you never took.

SARAH. They proved it, Nanny.

NANNY. Never! 'Twas only Elias Waycott's word against Mr. Coaker's. And who be Elias Waycott——?

SARAH. 'Tis silly to talk like that. Everybody knows Elias. He's straight as a line.

NANNY. He's like his uncle Jacob—a hateful, cruel devil.

SARAH. Don't say such things. Mr. Jacob be a power in the land—rich and strong—and Elias is his lawful heir, and a man very well thought upon by his betters.

NANNY. You wait—you wait and see what comes of it. My husband's a proper tiger when he's angered. He'll lie behind a hedge for gamekeeper, I shouldn't wonder! He'll be evens with him—he's swore it—and I want half a pound of bacon for Mr. Coaker's supper. The poor wretch haven't put his teeth into a bit of decent meat since they locked him up.

SARAH. [*Taking knife and cutting and weighing bacon.*] I hope he'll be good and peaceful. 'Tis very sad that such a clever man as him should always be in mischief.

Enter WILLES GAY.

NANNY. My husband's home again, Mr. Gay.

GAY. And how did he like it?

NANNY. The work was nought.

GAY. There's no man works so hard to escape work as your man. [*To SARAH.*] Have 'e got any more of them big meat hooks, Mrs. Dunnybrig?

SARAH. You had the last. Shall I order some?

GAY. 'Tis no odds. I can do without. And I'll take back one of they fine bloaters for my missis.

NANNY. There's nought a woman with child fancies like a bloater. 'Twas the same with me; I properly raged for 'em.

SARAH. [*Handing over bacon, which she has wrapped up in a piece of newspaper.*] Fourpence, Nanny, please.

[*NANNY gives her a shilling, and she opens till for change.*]

GAY. God knows how I shall come through it. My knees knock when I think about it. There's five thousand women die in child-bed every year, I'm told.

SARAH. All along of tight-lacing. 'Tis their own fault—not Nature's. Vanity have been the death of millions of us.

GAY. You can't bring that against my Eliza. She's broader than she's long. An uglier woman don't live; and she knows it.

NANNY. She's all right. 'Tis shameful such a prosperous man as you should look on the dark side of things.

GAY. I grant you I'm never hopeful for myself; but I always take a bright view about everybody else.

NANNY. No use being a cheerful man to your

neighbours if you behave like a death's head at home.

SARAH. [*Giving NANNY a handful of biscuits.*] Here's a present for your childer.

NANNY. You kind creature! I was looking at them biscuits and thinking of my little boys just afore you come in the shop. Well, good evening. And you cheer up your wife, Mr. Gay, like you cheer up other people. And tell her to walk the soles off her shoes, instead of sitting to home mooning over "The Churching of Women." Time enough for that presently. [*Exit NANNY COAKER.*]

GAY. Us'll hope her husband's had his lesson and will be a reformed character in future.

SARAH. He's breathing out vengeance against the gamekeeper, Elias Waycott, that had him put away. [*She gives him fish wrapped up in paper.*]

GAY. [*Handing twopence to SARAH and putting the fish into his pocket.*] There's a man, now!

SARAH. Don't you say nothing against him to me.

GAY. Not I. A very proper, honest chap. You want Elias for a son-in-law—eh?

SARAH. And why not?

GAY. A good, gentle, sensible creature, and he have a great power of friendship.

[*Enter THOMAS TURTLE. He carries a sheet of notepaper.*]

GAY. Here's postmaster! Good evening, postmaster.

TURTLE. Good evening, Willes Gay. You are

fortunate to be here. Something has happened—a very remarkable, dangerous thing.

SARAH. There! And if I wasn't saying but yester-even that nought ever happens in Little Silver.

TURTLE. We have our share of adventures—and everything comes to my ears first. Nothing misses me.

GAY. Us all run to you, postmaster, because you be made of brains—to say it civilly.

SARAH. There's none can put two and two together like you, Mr. Turtle.

TURTLE. The Lord helping—always the Lord helping. 'Tis only by keeping my eyes on Heaven that I walk the earth so steady, Butcher Gay.

GAY. A regular prophet, I'm sure.

TURTLE. I don't say that. 'Tis a big word; yet I'm often surprised to see how the Almighty and me look at things from the same point of view. [*Giving paper to SARAH.*] This document must be stuck up on the winder, Mrs. Dunnybrig, for all eyes to see. In a word, Farmer Waycott is missing and there's every reason to fear the worst.

SARAH. Good powers! Jacob Waycott!

GAY. A very powerful, rich man; and yet a very hard man where money's concerned. Would sell the primrosen off his mother's grave, that man.

TURTLE. He may be dead, and you mustn't speak against the dead, Willes Gay, because their mouths are stopped. The dead have no friends. Jacob Waycott's pony has been found with its neck broken

in Cann Quarry—saddle and reins and stirrups and all complete. And the bit in its teeth, they say. But Jacob Waycott has not been found.

SARAH. My stars! If he's gone, 'twill be a far reaching thing.

GAY. A lot of difference 'twill make all round. A good few I could name will dance for joy—to say it civilly.

SARAH. I'm in a twitter a'ready. This means——

GAY. It means my man, Philip Blanchard, will be after your Hester—that's one thing it means.

SARAH. Yes, faith—and another besides him—Jacob's nephew!

TURTLE. If old Waycott's gone, then Elias Waycott will be greatly uplifted. He's a very humble chap, but a well-meaning Christian. I shall support him for one.

GAY. And so shall I. And my Eliza, too.

SARAH. But Jacob may be living.

TURTLE. I think he's dead. 'Tis borne in upon me that he's dead. I see it afore my mind's eye. The pony runs away in Cann Wood.

GAY. And Jacob be brushed off its back, like a fly off a mutton chop.

TURTLE. They'll find him presently, and bury him along with the Waycott race, where they lie in their solemn company north side the yard. A great funeral 'twill be.

GAY. A black revel, I warrant you; and better than a fair for most folk,

TURTLE. He did evil in the sight of the Lord, and I was the only man brave enough to tell him so. But we must not judge.

SARAH. There'll be few tear flowing—unless Elias——

GAY. 'Twill take an onion in his handkerchief to bring 'em. You can't ask the people to weep. 'Tis enough if they don't shout for joy when the earth rattles on that man.

TURTLE. He's met his Maker and his Judge. And, looking forward, I see the future unroll as doth a scroll.

GAY. Trust you for that.

SARAH. Just when we were saying nothing ever happened, Mr. Gay!

GAY. Why, the world was never so full of things happening. There's this here fearful adventure, and Mrs. Gay with child, and the war in South Africa, and Lord knows what beside. Take my man, Philip Blanchard—this puts him on his feet again for one. Because, if Mr. Jacob be gone, young Elias will reign, and he'll let off many a debtor and be gentle and patient with all.

TURTLE. Don't be too sure of that. Sometimes the soft get hard in self-defence when they find the whip in their hand. Besides, 'tis well known to me that Jacob was very angry with his nephew so late as yesterday. Raged against him above all reason. Still, there's been no time to do anything, and if the old man has been snatched to his account, then Elias inherits for certain.

SARAH. And that means—oh, what don't it mean? Elias wants my Hester, and has been after her this two years in his humble, patient fashion. And Philip Blanchard too—he'll be on to her hot and fierce and fiery now—as only such a red man knows how to be. For he's free to wed.

GAY. Two on the war-path!

TURTLE. All these things are known to me. I can see cause and effect working as easily as common men can see the rain falling out of a cloud. Phil Blanchard knows that Elias won't force the mortgage and ruin him; and Elias, knowing that money is power, will——

GAY. Why, of course.

TURTLE. Hush, Gay—I'm speaking. It follows that both young fellows——

Enter ELIAS WAYCOTT.

TURTLE. Ah! Men don't call me a prophet for nothing, Elias!

ELIAS. I—I. What a rally of neighbours!

TURTLE. We understand you, Elias, and we think none the worse of you. The police are busy. Your late uncle will soon be found.

ELIAS. Such a little, light man! No doubt he was thrown and——

TURTLE. He's dead. I can see him lying in the woods with his busy brains scattered round him.

SARAH. 'Tis a wisht thought.

GAY. Give you joy of the future, Elias, I shall

pray for your happiness, because you are a very wise and clever young man, in my opinion. I hope you'll do nothing but good, and make the name of Waycott bring blessings instead of curses.

ELIAS. Thank you, Mr. Gay. 'Tis a great responsibility. Time enough—time enough. I'm here now——

SARAH. She's out. She'll be back along any minute.

TURTLE. Well, the future's in God's hands, as usual, and I think He's on your side, Elias; and if He is, then so am I. When first I mind you, you was just a little, gentle, girl-faced, orphan boy, and I never expected that you'd take to gamekeeping for a living. But human nature's full of surprises; though, in fairness to myself, I can say it don't often surprise me.

ELIAS. I liked the open air life. 'Tis quiet and lonely. And I liked the wild creatures.

TURTLE. It draws young people, same as the sea do. There's a spice of danger and darkness to it.

GAY. Poacher Coaker, for instance. He's got his knife in you proper—for bearing witness against him.

ELIAS. I was very sorry about that. I'd cautioned him twice. I had no choice, Mr. Gay. We've all got to do our duty.

GAY. You watch it, however—a very revengeful man.

TURTLE. You'll have to lift your brain to higher things than pheasants and hares now, Elias

ELIAS. I suppose I shall, postmaster.

GAY. No doubt you'll soon larn to handle money as easy as you handle ferrets.

ELIAS. Money can bite, too, they say. I'm all in a miz-maze about it. But there's one thing——

TURTLE. [*Tolerantly.*] I know—I know. What don't I know? She's a bowerly maiden and a steady church-goer. You'll offer a reward for the body, of course? As a matter of worldly wisdom, I advise that, for if by any chance he isn't dead and comes to life again, 'twould hurt his feelings and anger him a good bit if you'd done nothing to find him.

GAY. You make a fuss, Elias. It won't bring him to life, please God, so you need fear nought.

TURTLE. Let me advise you to offer twenty pounds and no less for the carcass of the man.

ELIAS. Say fifty, postmaster.

GAY. By gor! You're going it.

TURTLE. I will tell them at the Police Station that you offer fifty pounds for the discovery of Jacob Waycott's body—dead or alive.

[*Writes it on the note-paper he is carrying.*]

GAY. Not if he's alive, surely?

TURTLE. 'Tis only a matter of form. He's dead—haven't I said so?

GAY. An ugly corpse that man—the very foxes would run from it.

TURTLE. Be careful how you tell these things to your wife, Butcher Gay. You don't want your offspring to be born with a blood-red hand on his forehead, nor nothing like that.

GAY. Good Lord, postmaster! 'Tis bad enough as it is without no horrors. When you think that every year five thousand women——

[*Exeunt WILLES GAY and THOMAS TURTLE.*]

ELIAS. 'Tis safe enough. He's gone. I'm so sure he's dead as I'm sure I'm alive. And, of course, my first thought was your Hester. I hope it don't seem as if I was in too much of a hurry; but I'm so terrible feared that——

SARAH. I hope she's for you. I'd wish nothing better for her. But I can't tell you what she's thinking about. She keeps her heart inside her lips even from me. She's a guarded sort of woman. But she's always spoke of you with great kindness and respect.

ELIAS. She's far too good for me, or any man; but if true love and worship counts——

[*Enter JOHNNY SLOCOMBE.*]

JOHNNY. A penn'orth of pineapple drops, please ma'am.

SARAH. So you shall then, Johnny. How's your father to-day?

JOHNNY. [*Putting down penny.*] He's a lot better along o' hearing Mr. Waycott be lost. [*Takes the sweets.*] Faither says if Mr. Waycott be gone dead, he'll hoist up his jubilee flag and go and get drunk for joy.

SARAH. He didn't ought to talk like that.

JOHNNY. Didn't he, ma'am? I'll tell him. But he hated Mr. Waycott that fearful.

[*Exit* JOHNNY SLOCOMBE.

SARAH. Who didn't, for that matter?

ELIAS. He was a man without any milk of human kindness. 'Twas dried up in him. All for power he was.

SARAH. He ruled by fear.

ELIAS. We were sadly out at the end—him and me.

SARAH. Like a bit of stone when his mind was made up.

ELIAS. I did the best I could to pleasure him. Many little friendly actions in my small way I did, Mrs. Dunnybrig. But a man's a man and can't do impossible things. He wanted me to marry Milly Masters; and her father was set on it too. Then they'd have had a ring fence round their two big, famous farms and died happy.

SARAH. You can't make young people marry to build old men's ring fences—'t isn't in reason. [*Looking out of window.*] Here's my girl coming. I'll be gone and leave you to set on to her. Stick this in the window, Elias. 'Tis ready gummed.

[*She gives Elias the paper that Mr. Turtle brought, and then goes off through door behind counter. ELIAS licks the paper, sticks it on to glass window of shop door and then opens the door for HESTER DUNNYBRIG.*

Enter HESTER DUNNYBRIG.

ELIAS. Good evening, Hester.

HESTER. You! I didn't expect you to-night. Bain't you too busy to run about?

ELIAS. The first business of my life was here.

HESTER. 'Tis a terrible come-along-of-it. 'Twould be false to say I'm sorry for you. I'm like the rest—glad for you; and glad for others beside you.

ELIAS. I know—I know. It seems hard-hearted, yet 'tis natural. He kept a heavy hand on Little Silver.

HESTER. Tom Nosworthy was saying in his comical way, that they did ought to put up a statue to the pony. But us can't swear he's dead yet.

ELIAS. He's dead, Hester. I feel it—else I wouldn't be here on my great errand. He's met a fatal mishap and they'll find him in Cann Woods afore long. So like as not I shall myself this night. I've offered fifty pounds for him and master has thrown open the woods for the searchers.

HESTER. You'll be rich now; and never a man like to use the money kinder or cleverer.

ELIAS. Rich—eh? Shall I be rich, I wonder? Money can't buy what I want. So I'm neither richer nor poorer yet. But I'm free—if he's gone, I'm free; and I'll not speak scornful of money neither, for it rounds the corners of life and smoothes the rough places. But first—first—afore all—oh, Hester, 'tis a rash and reckless thing; but 'tis humble too—I'd be humble and daring in a breath if I could. I feel

hopeless about it, yet 'tis no use feeling that. I ought to have a cheerful conceit of myself, because you can't fight proper if you don't think you be going to win. Yet how can a man like me dare to think he be going to win—you? But so it is, Hester. I love you and I have done this two year. So long ago as that I began—a queer, gentle, sad feeling first. It drove me to the deepest places in the woods. Then it growed to be the salt of my waking hours. It made me feel I was born, Hester. And the day without a sight of you was a blank day; and the day I saw you was a good day; and the day I spoke to you and touched your hand was a day of days. A wonderful, deep-moving creation—love of woman. It made me kinder to all the world. It made me kill the creatures kinder—aye, and be sorry to kill 'em. I'm glad I shan't kill no more now. . . . So there it is—I offer myself—though a thing of little wit or worth. . . . A poor sort of husband, I reckon; but God's my judge, I'd leave no prayer of yours unanswered that was in my power to grant. My love be like this: I want for your life to be all peace and plenty and your days all joy. I'd be doorkeeper for you, Hester, and stand between you and everything that's sad and cruel and difficult. That's the best I can plan for myself—just to help make your life a better thing.

HESTER. You gentle creature! Was ever such a man as you, Elias? You teach a girl to say "no" to you, by the humble fashion you ask.

ELIAS. Do I, Hester?

HESTER. For sure. 'Tisn't the way to make love, I reckon. And yet 'tis beautiful. Only the world's hard—hard and busy and selfish and miserable. And when people like you come along and offer everything for nothing, like cheap Jack at the Fair, the world doubts 'em, or else laughs at 'em.

ELIAS. You can't have anything for nothing, Hester.

HESTER. No, you can't. So 'tis silly to think to be doorkeeper to a woman's life and say you're content to stand on her threshold and fright away trouble. A scarecrow does that for corn. Marriage be bed and board and give and take and rough and tumble, for better, for worse. 'Tis reality—not make-believe—a live, working thing—built to stand a lifetime if it be built right. You mustn't make your wife an image to pray to. She's got to be half yourself and share the fight as well as the fun. And she's got to love as well as be loved.

ELIAS. That's right. 'Tis marriage in a nutshell—to share all—love included. 'Twould be awful for a woman to give her body and keep back her heart.

HESTER. Awful sometimes; sometimes only cruel sad. If I took you, Elias—there'd be no sadness like our sadness.

ELIAS. You can't love me, Hester.

HESTER. I do love you; I won't lie; but 'tis cold comfort and you needn't look like that. I'm not very clever at finding words and this beats me; but I've

got to explain. Of course a woman knows like lightning when a man loves her. Only men blunder about that; women never. I've seen this longful time that you meant to offer when the way was smooth. So 'tis no surprise. And I say again, Elias, that I do love you, for you're a rare sort of chap and a woman ought to be proud to take your fancy. But—oh, 'tis hard to explain——

ELIAS. Then don't try. I understand without words. There's things beyond words. This is not your fault—only my misfortune. You love me in a sort of way—you've said it. But not the marriage way. Just cool friendship—eh, Hester?

HESTER. 'Tis like you to make it easy for me. Yes, I'm proud to be your friend—always, always. There never was a man just like you afore; and the strangeness of you and the gentleness of you will always stand against you with us stupid fools.

ELIAS. I daresay I could be a bit more bold and blusterous if I was to try, Hester.

HESTER. Not you—you're a gentleman—that's what's the matter with you, Elias. And I ain't used to that sort. A man I understand, but not a gentleman.

ELIAS. Good-bye for the present, Hester. You'll forgive me for asking?

HESTER. Forgive you! You're one in a thousand I tell you—rarer than that gold bird as came to the woods in the spring. [*Takes his hand.*] And if 'tis in our power to serve you, me and mine

will proudly do so; I pray you'll let us be your friends.

ELIAS. You and yours—it lies there, Hester. I understand. And I say “God bless you and yours.”

[The bell rings violently and the door is thrust open. Enter PHILIP BLANCHARD in his working clothes—a butcher's blue blouse, with blood-stained white apron over it.]

PHILIP. What ho, Elias! Give 'e good luck, my son! Everybody's in a hurry to think this brave news be true, and none more than me. But I say 'tis too good to be true. Such rare fortune don't happen.

ELIAS. You mean my uncle Jacob? I judge it's true enough, Blanchard.

PHILIP. A worthless, hard-hearted old devil—though your uncle. He ground the face of the poor for fifty years and I hope he'll be found, if 'tis only for the pleasure we'll all take in spitting on his grave. And come to think of it, we're all at your mercy now, Elias!

HESTER. A man made of mercy.

ELIAS. [*To* HESTER.] Good-bye. I shall be busy for a bit now. We may not meet again very quick.

HESTER. You're welcome as the flowers whenever you be pleased to come, Elias.

[She goes to the door and opens it for him.]

PHILIP. Don't you get down-daunted and woe-begone and frightened because you be rich, Waycott. You'll soon grow used to it. And don't you ax me to touch my hat to 'e, because I never will. Ha, ha!

ELIAS. I shall be just the same as I was afore, Blanchard.

PHILIP. You think so, but you won't.

[Exit ELIAS WAYCOTT.]

PHILIP. The power in that meek chap's hands! Think of it. Just a fly stings a pony, and it bolts and lets the life out of a rascal; and then the whole face of the world is changed.

HESTER. Because a good man follows a bad.

PHILIP. Exactly so! And you know where I'd have the first change fall—you know—behind them beautiful, misty, grey eyes of yours. The first moment I heard it, it flashed over me like a flame of fire! "I can ax her now," I said. And here I be, and I'll answer as well as ax, for I'll not take "no"—not from your own lips will I take it—no, nor yet if all the angels in heaven and devils in hell said "no!" I've been burning away for 'e for a thousand years, and roaming out o' nights, and damning the moon, and blasting fate and chance and biting my nails to the quick—look at 'em—and all to hit on a plan. And now—Hester—for God's sake come in here—inside my arms quick and say you'll marry me afore Michaelmas—else there'll be nothing but cinders left of me.

HESTER. Oh, Phil, d'you mean it? Such a fiery, headlong, godless man as you be. I'm afeard of 'e.

PHILIP. You afeard? You ban't afeard of nothing on two legs—that I'll swear. And I'd lay down all my lives for 'e, if I had as many as a cat. You darling thing—almost too soft and round for a gert

chap like me to cuddle. Yet I'll be so gentle—so gentle as I be when I kill the lambs! Greedy—greedy as the grave I be for 'e, Hester! All—all—body and soul I'll have—not a very patient build of man—you know that. But—come close—come close. Oh God, I want to eat you!

HESTER. You savage thing!

PHILIP. I'll do deeds above all that was ever done for 'e! I'd fight this world and the next for 'e. And you're the fighting sort, for all you're such a soft-eyed creature. There's a lot of granite hid in you too.

HESTER. You've got to be hard to the world.

PHILIP. Hard to the world but soft to each other. Dark to the world but light to each other.

HESTER. You trust nought and believe in nought save yourself, Phil. 'Tis dangerous.

PHILIP. I'll believe in you then; and I'll believe in God if you'll take me. 'Tis only a fine, waking, working God could make such a piece as you for a man.

[Puts his arms round her.]

HESTER. Before I speak——

PHILIP. You have spoke, else you wouldn't be here. Your eyes have spoke, and your round bosom panting like the sea! I be drownin' in joy!

HESTER. And so be I, Phil.

[Their lips join and remain joined.]

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE: *Parlour of PHILIP BLANCHARD'S cottage.*
Time evening. Upon a table in the middle of the room stand a bottle of spirits and glasses. An oil lamp burns on the table and a woman's workbox and sewing lie under the light. Two old easy chairs stand beside the hearth, where a small fire burns. A kettle steams on the hob. Over the mantelshelf and on the walls are familiar old pictures from illustrated journals. A few pot plants stand on the window-sill and the white blinds are drawn behind them. The room is poor, but not lacking in comfort, and the light is bright and genial. Six months have passed since the events of the first Act.

[*Enter PHILIP BLANCHARD, followed by SARAH DUNNYBRIG.*

PHILIP. She'll be down house in a minute. We've got a visitor to-night.

SARAH. I had a message for her from Mrs. Gay, that's all. She's feeling worse than usual and very wishful for Hester's company.

PHILIP. Bother the woman! But, of course, she

must go. Willes Gay means to let me have a share in the business.

SARAH. A share? That's news.

PHILIP. Keep it quiet. He'll bring it out in his own time. No credit to me, I reckon, but thanks to Hester. His wife dotes on her, and she must keep in with Eliza Gay, of course.

SARAH. Who be coming to-night, then?

PHILIP. A very big man. No less than Elias Waycott.

SARAH. I heard he was home.

PHILIP. Yes—back from his travels. Very near round the world he's wandered, they say. But he's the man he always was, and be coming without any fuss to see me and Hester. The world don't change him. He'd be just so humble if he'd travelled to the moon.

SARAH. How things happen! I prayed to God six months ago that Hester would take him and not you, Phil.

PHILIP. Natural enough, mother. I don't blame you. He's worth a hundred of me—in money and brains both.

SARAH. Not for Hester. The Lord knowed best. You was the man for her. Bright as a rose and joyous as a bird on a bough is she. She told me a bit back-along that she never thought no human could be so happy as her.

PHILIP. Same here. I wouldn't change with the King of England. The world's a very good place.

SARAH. 'Tis like Elias to harbour no feeling. Or if he do, he'll hide it.

[Enter HESTER. *She carries a bright gilt clock.*

PHILIP *hastens forward and takes it from her.*

HESTER. 'Tis Elias—his wedding gift, you remember. Too grand to use every day till we get up in the world a bit and have a better house presently. But he's coming to-night, so I thought us would put it on the mantelshelf.

PHILIP. You clever woman! I'll wind it up.

[*Looks at his watch and sets the clock going.*

SARAH. Mrs. Gay wants you—'tis that I came for. She's took very queer and thinks she's going to die afore morning.

HESTER. I'll run over a bit later. I can't come just yet. Stop and see Elias, mother.

SARAH. Nay, I must be gone—I'm busy. And I'm terrible glad to hear this about Phil and Mr. Gay.

HESTER. A share in the business—'tis great news.

SARAH. So 'tis then. Us'll hope 'tis the beginning of fortune. [*Kisses HESTER.*] Good night—good night, Phil.

PHILIP. Good night, mother.

[*Exit SARAH DUNNYBRIG.*

PHILIP. Put out the box of pipes, Hester. He loved a long clay—like all they thoughtful men. And don't forget the lemon and sugar. He'll see you a bit fatter than you was.

HESTER. And a mighty deal happier.

PHILIP. Yet us didn't ought to be too cheerful

afore him neither, for 'twill make him feel the more what he's lost.

HESTER. You thoughtful man! But 'tis hard to pull a long face when you be full of good news. He's not the sort to grudge us our happiness. We shall have our bad times like the rest.

PHILIP. Never—not so long as we can——

[Puts his arms round her and kisses her. She returns the embrace. There is a knock at the door.]

PHILIP. Here, dammy! Us can't be honeymooning for ever!

[HESTER goes to the door and admits ELIAS WAYCOTT. She shakes hands with him very warmly.]

HESTER. You're properly welcome, I'm sure. Come in—come in.

PHILIP. Give me your coat—fur on the collar—look, Hester! I lay Dartymoor air strikes terrible shrewd after foreign parts, Elias?

ELIAS. 'Tis good to breathe it again, however.

PHILIP. Well, you be the monkey that have seen the world, and no mistake!

ELIAS. So I have—so I have; but there's no place like home, Philip.

HESTER. Be you going to live in your uncle's house?

ELIAS. I shall do so.

PHILIP. And turn farmer?

ELIAS. I'm doubtful as to that. But work I must.

PHILIP. Tired of play I reckon. Do 'e smoke the old "churchwardens," or be you got too fine now?

ELIAS. I've given up tobacco.

PHILIP. Well, well—that's bad!

HESTER. Sit down, Elias.

ELIAS. Life's a very wonderful thing when you see it like what I have—all colours and in all countries.

PHILIP. I'll warrant 'tis a proper circus. You'll drink anyway—Hester's mixing. You mustn't say "no" to that.

ELIAS. Just a spot then—no more.

[HESTER *brews some drink.*

ELIAS. You see, Nature's been my guide till now—just the life of the woods and the wild creatures. But I soon found it weren't enough. You can't learn the truth from squirrels; you can't pick up the wisdom of the world and your duty to the world from trees. I be a poor learner—— But I'm not here to chatter about myself.

HESTER. Yes, yes; that's what we want to hear. You found the world a big place?

ELIAS. That I have, Mrs. Blanchard.

HESTER. "Hester" to you, Elias.

PHILIP. There's too much sea in the world from the look of the map—that's what I always say.

ELIAS. Not a drop! The sea's a great peace-maker. It have kept humans off each other's throats time and again; and given the nations a chance to still their anger and hatred afore they come to blows.

PHILIP. Well, you be going to set the world right with the best of them now—such a clever, deep chap as you be.

ELIAS. I must try and set myself right. I've been reading a pack of books. 'Tis strange how these wise men, that write the books, do think things out to the bottom, till your head spins. Yet even the wisest of 'em contradict each other—just like you and I might, Philip!

PHILIP. That's their way of fighting—to tell each other they be damned liars—in book language.

ELIAS. Some men fight the world and some turn their backs on the world and fight themselves. But to tell the truth I'm no fighter.

PHILIP. There's happiness to be got out of fighting all the same, and there's the glory of winning.

HESTER. The poor have got to fight.

ELIAS. When you name "happiness"—you name a very queer contrivance. The path of happiness be hid, like the path of a bird in the air. It's going and coming is a secret. It don't depend on fighting, or running away, nor on money, nor poverty, nor on sense, nor luck, nor health, nor sickness. Happiness be a natural gift, like Hester's grey eyes and your great arm, Phil; and life can't make you miserable if Nature's planned for you to be happy.

HESTER. That's right enough—look at me and my husband.

ELIAS. I was always a twilight sort of man myself; but the less you hope, the less you'll suffer.

HESTER. A great gift of looking backward you had, and living in the past.

ELIAS. Not a very tight hold on the future—nor yet on life for that matter. God forgive me, I doubt if I ever value life enough. Yes, I cast my gaze a good bit behind me. The past always seemed a sad thing to me—just because 'twas gone for ever and ever.

PHILIP. There's always the future and the chance of luck. The past be dead; the future's alive.

ELIAS. That queer I was as a stripling boy! Why, I'd mourn that I couldn't bathe in the same river twice, because the water was always running away!

PHILIP. What a thought!

ELIAS. Then again I could find it in me to be sorry for the flowers. For why? Because no flower ever sees its own fruit.

PHILIP. [*Looking at his wife.*] I know a flower as will. [*To ELIAS.*] These be brain-sick fancies—not worthy of such a man as you, Elias. Yet I'll grant this—the less wit, the more happiness. Maybe that's why I'm so cheerful and always laughing.

ELIAS. If you see the kingdoms of the world in a thinking spirit, you can't be happy no more.

PHILIP. Then I'll bide at home and look no deeper than my own hopes. Yet you're one of the lucky ones, for you've been poor and you are rich. You see clear, because you know what the poor know, and money can never blind you, like it does them that are born to it.

HESTER. Be the lawyers all friendly, Elias?

ELIAS. Couldn't be more so. But the Law's a very cautious creature. The Law won't let a vanished man be dead for seven year. But in my case, that don't make it difficult, because there's no will and I'm sole heir.

HESTER. I've often thought the old man was knocked on the head—else surely his bones would have been found afore now.

ELIAS. 'Tis a fearful idea, but the lawyers and the police are of the same mind.

PHILIP. There's a score of ill-used men must have itched to do it.

ELIAS. Like enough. He was a great devourer of widow's houses and merciless in his dealings. The books show that. Cruel hard where money was the matter.

PHILIP. Take me—I might have done it. Take you—you might have done it. And if the murderer turned up to-morrow, there's not a man on earth would want to punish him.

ELIAS. Don't talk so rash and reckless, Philip. There's the Law—a dark, heartless thing above all feeling. There's Justice, which works for the dead as well as for the living. And murder's murder, and Justice hangs a man for it.

PHILIP. [*Laughing.*] Then be hanged to Justice and let the Law swing on its own gallows afore it finds the doer.

ELIAS. I'd sooner think 'twas a fatal accident, and

that he'd been knocked off his pony and flung down one of they holes of the old copper mine in Cann Wood.

HESTER. He might lie there till doom and never be found.

PHILIP. No carrion will choke a crow, so we'll hope the birds and foxes and other varmints got a meal off his bones. One stinging wasp less in the world. But he stored a bit of stolen honey for others to use. Afore my father died he bested Jacob Waycott, and old Jacob got back on me. That's how 'twas. He wouldn't let me pay the mortgage on they fields that father left me, though they were my whole fortune. "The sins of the fathers shall break the children's backs," that's what he said, and laughed to see my trouble.

ELIAS. That'll be all right, Philip. There's none to question what I'm pleased to do.

HESTER. You good man! There's many be blessing you already.

ELIAS. What for? 'Tis common fair play. I only want peace; and the best way to get peace yourself is to bring it to others.

PHILIP. Peace ban't everything. 'Tis a sure sign you be getting old when you seek peace and the chimney-corner. I'm for a bit o' fighting, and dancing, and laughing I am—so's Hester.

ELIAS. 'Tis! a great gift of laughter you always had. I envy you that.

HESTER. Us must larn you to laugh, Elias.

[Fills his glass again.]

PHILIP. A tramp taught me to laugh. A lazy, worthless dog, and dead years ago. Laughed at work; laughed at wickedness; laughed at forty shillings or a month; laughed at the justices of the peace; laughed at life, and, when it came, laughed at death. I sometimes think if I was to listen, I'd hear him laughing still in his nameless grave.

[*A knock at the door. PHILIP opens it and admits WILLES GAY, who enters hatless and very anxious and haggard.*]

PHILIP. Good Lord, master! What's come to 'e?

GAY. Fatherhood's come to me! They be making me a father so fast as it can be done, and I must have company. The bolt have fallen. The doctor's there, and when I stood before him in all the solemn terror of a coming father, he told me to run away and play! Those were his words. My wife face to face with death or victory—and I'm told to run away and play!

ELIAS. There's a tribe of savages that put the fathers to bed, and make a terrible fuss over 'em when a child be going to be born.

GAY. Ah! The heathen know a bit! Even they caunibals have got their proper feelings seemingly. I'd be only too thankful to go to bed this minute; but 'twould be told against me. I heard you was back, Elias Waycott. Excuse me if I walk up and down. 'Tis a fearful strain—especially when you think that five thousand die of it every year.

HESTER. I was going over to Mrs. Gay presently.

GAY. She can't see you now. She can't see anyone.

Mrs. Tippetts is along with her—far too hopeful that woman.

PHILIP. [*Giving GAY a drink.*] Here, sup this off and take another, master. You want a drop of courage.

GAY. If there'd been time, I'd have sent for a second doctor—one who knows what it is to be a father himself. These bachelor men haven't been through the hell of it, or they wouldn't—

ELIAS. Keep your nerve, Mr. Gay. After all 'tis your own fault. No man need enter into matrimony if they be faint-hearted about childer. 'Tis the men decide what women shall be mothers, not the women—eh, Hester?

HESTER. [*Laughing.*] And the women only too glad of the chance as a rule. Most of us wait, like apples on the bough, and hope for the hand to come and pluck us afore we grow over-ripe.

GAY. That's what I say. The dark deed is ours every time; and so the remorse falls on our shoulders.

PHILIP. Remorse! What ugly stuff be that? A scarecrow to fright fools, I reckon. You wait till you've got a brave babby yowling the roof off your house! Then you'll feel ten year younger and hungry for a dozen of 'em. Here's luck and a fine young butcher afore morning! [*Drinks.*]

GAY. As to that, if 'tis a boy, he'll be certain sure to want to go to sea. My wife's people be all sailors, and the child takes after the mother.

HESTER. Perhaps 'twill be a little maid.

GAY. I hope so—she couldn't go to sea. I'd dote on a daughter; but I'm not one of the lucky ones.

ELIAS. You mustn't say that, or good luck will leave you.

GAY. 'Tis you be fortunate, Elias Waycott. Not a chick nor child—not a care. Just yourself to mind, and your houses and lands. They can't get in the family-way, like wives, or turn round and smite you and break your heart, like childer. 'Tis a most blessed state to be complete in yourself, with nought to do but count your money.

ELIAS. Who's so strong that he can stand alone?

GAY. You are. You're somebody now in the eyes of other people.

ELIAS. And still the same man in my own.

PHILIP. Get a fine wife then. There's nought like a loving woman to give you a better conceit of yourself.

GAY. They don't always. Sometimes they'll tell you the bitter truth about your character, morning, noon and night—especially night. At such times they'll flay you alive with their tongues and you wake up raw as a rib o' beef in the morning.

PHILIP. No doubt. 'Tis just a bit of luck whether a wife makes an angel or a devil of a man.

HESTER. Or he makes an angel or a devil of her.

PHILIP. But you'll find the right sort, Elias.

ELIAS. Nay, nay. I've got a lot of kind friends—that's enough for me.

HESTER. Kindness made alive you are yourself.

PHILIP. But don't be too soft, Elias; don't be too soft with the people.

GAY. Charity's one of the greatest blessings of the rich. 'Tis in their reach every hour of the day.

ELIAS. I've thought a lot upon it. The rich folk be a bit blind there in my opinion. They take the wrong-headed view and put money afore men. 'Tis the rights of man, not the rights of money, us have to consider. They can count up the figures in their cash books; but they can't count up the number of the rich and subtract it from the number of the poor.

PHILIP. Ah! That's a sum the poor do very clever for themselves nowadays.

GAY. No doubt we be putting some sharp questions against the arithmetic of the rich. The meek was promised the earth and they begin to think 'tis time they had it.

ELIAS. The rich don't know they're born, neighbours; but that's the first thing the poor find out. [*Rising.*]

PHILIP. Money's power, however; and 'tis a poor creature don't glory in power. Haven't Mr. Gay here been generous and sporting and given me a bit in the business, and don't me and my wife go an inch taller for it? Ban't the money only—'tis the power.

GAY. I do my little bit to help make the world go round, and I always shall. In fact I do to others as I hope and trust the Lord will do to me.

ELIAS. And you'll get your goodness back with interest, be sure.

HESTER. You may have got it when you go home. Like enough there'll be a beautiful babby waiting for your arms.

GAY. God grant I don't drop him, for 'twill be sure to give me a great spasm when I touch the little creature. And don't you kill John Lake's pig tomorrow morning, Phil, for it bides within fifty yards of our house, and if my Eliza be still living, she'd never stand the noise.

ELIAS. I'll see you home, Willes Gay. [*They pick up their hats and put on their coats. PHILIP and HESTER help them to do so and shake hands with ELIAS.*]

GAY. Good night—good night—Please the Lord 'tis the last time I shall see the moon as a childless man. [*To ELIAS.*] I'm as brave a human as any other human and a very steadfast-minded Christian in the affairs of my neighbours. I've got the faith that moves mountains—for other people; but there 'tis—figures—they be such cold, dreadful monsters. And when you know that every year five thousand—

[*Exeunt GAY and ELIAS WAYCOTT. PHILIP shuts the door on them.*]

HESTER. Poor, dear chap. He ban't very happy, I'm fearing.

PHILIP. Elias? He'll be all right. 'Tis only the strangeness. Lucky in life—unlucky in love.

HESTER. [*Putting her arms round his neck.*] Money be cold comfort against love, Phil.

PHILIP. Yes—for the likes of Elias.

HESTER. We'll be true friends to him if he'll let us.

PHILIP. I'm wonder-struck that he can bear to bide within sight of you. 'Tis a shape of love I don't understand. I couldn't have done that if you'd chucked me. I'd have fled t'other side of the world if you'd said "no" to me, Hester. Or maybe gone out of the world altogether. But Elias—though his life haven't got no salt for him, yet he'd never have the manhood to take leave of it. He ban't built to feel very cruel deep about his life, I reckon. It only puzzles him. He'll wander on in his gentle, easy way, and do his duty and feel no more happy nor sad about it than the river. He'd have loved you very dear; but not so grand and fiery as I love you, Hester.

HESTER. You don't love me grander than I love you, Phil. I hang on you for every joy and delight. I'd give my life for you if need was. I wake every morning and wonder such a man lives—and all for me. Oh Phil—I'm selfish: I can't look outside our own hearts.

PHILIP. How should you? Our all be there I reckon. Let the sad people go round the world; here's world enough for me. [*A knock at the door.*]

HESTER. [*Leaving him.*] 'Tis Mr. Gay with his news. [*Opens the door.*] No, 'tisin't.

Enter THOMAS TURTLE.

PHILIP. Why, postmaster! Who'd dream to see you at this time o' night?

TURTLE. Nobody; and yet don't think it happened

by chance. Chance ain't allowed to play monkey tricks with a man like me, Philip Blanchard. I have just met Elias Waycott, and he sends a message to you.

PHILIP. He's left us but five minutes.

TURTLE. True. And yet what God can do in five minutes! He sent me, because he couldn't come back himself. Perhaps he never will.

HESTER. Good gracious! Why not, Mr. Turtle?

TURTLE. Ah, there lies the wonder! A dark and fearful thing has happened—perhaps the most fearful thing that I can call to mind for thirty years in this village.

HESTER. My goodness, postmaster, what be you saying?

PHILIP. If he's in trouble I'll——

[Preparing to go.]

TURTLE. Stop where you are. He is in trouble, but none that his friends can save him from. He is beyond the reach of friend or enemy now. He is in the Hands of his Maker. The arm of the Law be on him. In a word, the man has just been took up by the police for the murder of his uncle six months ago.

HESTER. Elias! Elias kill a man!

TURTLE. I've got the power of speech, thank God; so if you'll listen to me you'll understand. First, I must tell you the body of old Waycott was found yesterday in Cann Woods. That rascal, Saul Coaker, the poacher, was the one that found it—ferreted it out somehow, though 'twas in a pit far deeper than a churchyard

grave. Down to the bottom of an old mine hole ; hid under a ton of brush and stones, was Jacob Waycott. And in my far-seeing way, the first thing I thought when I heard it was how strange for Saul Coaker to take Elias's fifty pound reward with one hand and put Elias in prison with the other ! So God works.

HESTER. But surely, surely——

TURTLE. Let me flow on—else you'll miss the tale. Of course Coaker was poaching ; but as I've pointed out before to-day, Providence often uses a bad man to do its dirty work. And the lesser crime be nothing against the greater. First, the rascal, looking after his traps a month ago, found old Waycott's far-famed black hat, the like of which no man ever saw afore or since. 'Twas deep hid in a thorn bush ; and with that he began his secret search. Night after night he hunted, for he reckoned, with a good deal of sense for such a man, that where Jacob Waycott's hat was, his head wouldn't be far off. And in the Lord's good time the corpse was found stowed safe and deep, with his skull broke in.

HESTER. But why for Elias ?

TURTLE. It points to him. He and his old uncle were out, as we all know, and Jacob was heard to threaten Elias and swear to alter his will the very day before he disappeared. And so Elias had everything to gain by cutting him short. And then he was the gamekeeper in those very woods, and knew every hole and corner, and had a right to be there. And he was there that identical day,

and never denied it at the time. But I heard him vow to God afore the policeman just now that he was innocent of the crime, for I was passing at the moment and heard all. And he begged me to step in here, afore you went to bed, and break the harsh news.

HESTER. 'Tis madness! Who on earth could dream murder against such as him?

TURTLE. That's where the Law soars above us, Mrs. Blanchard, like a hawk above a sparrow. We may think he's innocent, and say we know him and know that he couldn't do any such desperate deed. But the Law don't know him, and don't want to know him. The Law's no respecter of persons. He'll be called to stand his fair trial before the face of the Lion and Unicorn, like everybody else. And we shall bulk large in the nation's eye, and be the corner-stone of the newspapers for a time. But don't deceive yourselves, 'twill only be for a time; though while it lasts I hope every one of us will take it in a proper spirit, as I shall.

HESTER. He wanted us to know.

TURTLE. And I was there—sent by the Almighty to gather his message. I'd gone to the chemist's, to get a bottle of liniment for my daughter's rheumatism. Meek as Moses the man went. They'll lock him up at the station to-night, and take him afore the magistrate to-morrow. And then, all in good time, he'll be haled off to the assizes at Exeter. As like as not they'll want evidence of character, and I may

be called to the witness-box myself. We must leave him to his Maker and his Judge; but there's no just reason why we shouldn't pray for him, until he's proved guilty. We must all keep our heads. The coroner sits to-morrow, and the funeral will bring the people like flies to a cookshop. Good night; I must be moving here and there. A great deal will be expected from me and, God willing, I shall rise to it.

[HESTER opens the door for him and he goes out. PHILIP sits beside the table, where he has sat since MR. TURTLE entered.]

HESTER. What an awful, wicked thing! Be the people mad? To think that kindly creature—all goodness—such a man to—— Phil—why be you so silent? You don't fear for him?

PHILIP. For hate he done it. No man ever works so hard for love as he will for hate.

HESTER. Elias!

PHILIP. "Elias"! No. Saul Coaker. He swore he'd be quits with the keeper, if he had to wait till they was both in hell for it. And he kept his wrath warm—eh? To nose old Jacob out! Why, the foxes could never have found him. Buried under a proper mountain of dirt he was.

HESTER. What do you mean?

PHILIP. One foot in the grave had Jacob Waycott, and he didn't care who he kicked with t'other. But he kicked once too often. 'Tis a good yarn for a winter night. Draw near the fire and drink a drop out of my glass.

HESTER. You knew about it?

PHILIP. Who better? He fixed the meeting place himself. He wanted to hear all I knew about the old mine, because my mother's father had been captain of it fifty year back. He had ideas to set it going again, if he could find fools enough to float it. And when he axed me to tell him all I knew, I thought he was coming round and meant to be friendly. We met on the quiet and he heard all I could tell him. But then I came to my own affairs and he stung like an adder, and cursed my dead father and said I should have my teeth set on edge with his sour grapes. He goaded me to rage, Hester, and I lost myself and swung my stick and hit him down. Just one crack I gave him and no more. But it done the trick. A man that fells bullocks be bound to hit hard.

HESTER. You! Phil—Phil!

[Puts her arms round him.]

PHILIP. I didn't care if I swung for him then. I left the woods and went home. But, come the dark, my mind changed. I thought on you and grew wild to live. I couldn't be sure the dog was really dead, so I rayed myself and rose and went to see. A moony night and I had all the place to myself. If I'd met Elias then! But I didn't. And there was Jacob, dead as a hammer, and his old pony standing beside him, waiting for him to get up. So I made a clean job, as you've heard. I blindfolded the pony and led it over Cann Quarry Cliff; and then I went down and took the bandage off its eyes. 'Tis strange

I never thought on the old devil's hat. And now a bit of rotten felt be going to—— Not a shadow haunted me, Hester, and never has. I went back home along and slept as sound as a saint. For I'd done a rare useful thing, you see, and hoped to be richly rewarded for it. I only thought how much sweeter the world would be without that damned rogue in it. 'Twas no more to me than sticking a pig. My business be killing things, ban't it? And next morning my only thought was you, and my only wonder I hadn't seen that way out afore. Not in cold blood could I have killed the man—I don't say that; but I was properly thankful it had come to me in hot. A savage tale—eh? Cuddle close to me; you'm shivering like a leaf.

HESTER. Oh, my God! What's life done to us?

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE I: *The same as in Act II. The blinds of the window are up. The fire is out. HESTER, anxious and worn, sits intently reading a newspaper. MRS. DUNNYBRIG enters. She has a shawl over her head.*

HESTER. You be come ?

SARAH. I couldn't bide no longer. What is it ?

HESTER. The verdict ain't out, mother.

SARAH. Is Phil back ?

HESTER. He'll be home first thing this morning.

SARAH. Did they let him see Elias ?

HESTER. Us shall know all when he comes back—
all but the verdict and sentence. They won't be out
till noon.

SARAH. How do it read in cold print ?

HESTER. The judge is dreadfully against him.
Couldn't he look into the man's eyes and see truth
in 'em ?

SARAH. 'Tis said that justice be blind. It have got
ears, but no eyes.

HESTER. And no heart, seemingly.

SARAH. There's one blessing, however. He wasn't

called to wait long. They took him just afore the Assizes. But it have been long enough to turn his hair grey, I'll warrant—such a nervous man as him. 'Tis so easy to say "not guilty" and so hard to prove it. But that cuts both ways. They can't prove he done it, any more than he can prove he didn't.

[*A knock. Enter WILLES GAY in his white butcher's jacket and apron, with a steel at his girdle.*

GAY. Morning, ladies—be Phil home?

HESTER. I've had a postcard with a picture of Exeter gaol upon it. He'll be back early. I expect him any minute.

GAY. 'Twill be a great blessing to business when we can all settle down again, and Elias be set free, and my son vaccinated. There's something always hanging over human creatures. We've never got a clean sky above us. No doubt we'd be the first to grumble at the sun if we had. The verdict will be out afore dinner and the sentence atop of it. We shall hear the best or worst afore the shadow's off the east side of the church tower.

SARAH. 'Twas very good of you to let Phil go.

GAY. The doomed man wanted to see him, and who be I to stand in the way of such a summons? "Doomed" I call him, but 'tis too strong a word. We be leaving out the jury. Yet mercy's a thing far stronger in one heart than in eleven. What one man would shrink from, eleven men will stand to without a pang.

HESTER. The judge didn't shrink. He stings like a whip. He don't believe that Elias is innocent.

GAY. Did Phil see him?

HESTER. Yes, along with the lawyer. 'Twas allowed afore the trial.

SARAH. Please God he put heart into him.

HESTER. Like the Trump on the Last Day it is to read the judge.

GAY. Yet I find myself full of hope, and the darker the people feel the more I tell them that all is going to be right. He's an innocent man, and I don't care who hears me say so.

SARAH. If only you'd been on the jury!

GAY. I can't say as to that. A jury breeds its own bad spirit. You start out as bold as brass and ready to withstand the pack of 'em, and you're all on the side of the prisoner and mad against society for banding against a poor, solitary wretch as can't defend himself, and so on; and then, little by little, you feel yourself ceasing to be yourself, and you get dull and savage and baffled among such a lot of ins and outs, till at last you're sick of human nature and not a man no more, but just a wheel, or a handle, or a bit of machinery running with the rest. I know, because I've been called to it.

[HESTER goes to window and looks out.

SARAH. How's the babby this morning?

GAY. The doctor says 'tis better; but I tell my wife not to hope.

SARAH. What nonsense! 'Tis tempting Providence.

GAY. Sometimes I wonder how Providence will have the face to meet me when the day comes—to say it civilly. My life be all obstacles, and though I plough through 'em and keep a smiling face, the strain be fearful.

SARAH. Your missis have made a good recovery—that's something.

GAY. So they say; but I don't know. 'Tis the way to put off husbands with words. For my part I see a change in her.

SARAH. Never!

GAY. I do. 'Tis idle to deny that she gives her first thought to the child.

SARAH. You don't grudge the babby that?

GAY. 'Tis the thin edge of the wedge. He's a masterful nipper with a will of iron, and he'll come to be everything to her, if he's spared. Then I shall be so good as a widower. She undervalues my part in him and what I went through. You'd think, to hear her, that she'd done it single-handed, and all my credit and fame in the matter goes for nought. When I remind her of that terrible evening, she's right down contemptuous of my share. And the child as like me as two peas and all! [*To* HESTER.] Be you coming to her this morning? She's wishful to see you.

HESTER. After Phil gets back.

GAY. You'll find him changed, remember. You

can't hear justice done in a court of law without changing. 'Tis a damping thing at best, and the old Adam in a man always shivers afore it. For 'tis whispered to us that it may be our turn next. Justice be the most unexpected thing in the world—full of surprises and a great shock to human nature. 'Tis like the bullock's hoof that goes into a lark's nest, or the cartwheel that runs over the mole in the dark. You'd be sorry for the bird and beast, but who's to blame? Nobody. Justice be built on justice. 'Tis only the Almighty can break His own laws—not us worms.

[HESTER *lights the fire.*

SARAH. He's in the hands of God and so all's said.

GAY. Not all. God helps those who help themselves, and Elias haven't fought a very hard fight in my opinion.

SARAH. What more could he do than say he wasn't guilty?

GAY. They all say that. The Law must have something to work on. The majesty of the Law falls to the ground if a prisoner pleads "guilty." 'Tis like a busy man with his tools and cleverness coming to his work betimes and finding it done for him. The Law's very large-minded, remember. With all its faults, 'tis a very large-minded contrivance and always gives us the benefit of the doubt. The judge rubbed that into the jury.

HESTER. There was no doubt in his mind and he showed it.

GAY. Don't take the job to heart. I be positive

certain the man's going to get off. I wish I was so sure of my bad debts as I am about Elias. Yes, we'll all be standing him free drinks to-morrow. So cheer up and come over to my wife so soon as you can.

[*Exit WILLES GAY.*]

SARAH. Don't you fret no more, else people will wonder why you be taking it so hardly. The butcher's right. He'll be free to come back to his friends before long. Perhaps he is a'ready. We must all try to make it up to him.

HESTER. "Make it up to him!"

SARAH. Help him to forget what it feels like to be on your trial for murdering a man. 'Tis surely a dreadful thing if one's witty enough to picture it. No doubt such a clever creature as you can see with his eyes; and that's why you be so terrible down. But you must hide your feelings, else your husband won't like it. Phil will come home afore long, then you'll be better. And you mustn't take on, whatever happens! 'tis bad for you. [*Exit SARAH DUNNYBRIG.*]

[*HESTER tends the fire and sits crouched over it. Then she reads the paper again.*]

Enter SARAH DUNNYBRIG.

SARAH. Here's Phil coming down the road from the station. [*Exit SARAH DUNNYBRIG.*]

[*HESTER hurries to the door, then she hastens out. In a few moments she returns with PHILIP. He is in his best clothes and carries a carpet bag.*]

HESTER. Thank God, you're back! 'Tis a hundred years since you went. And I've had to hide my heart and put a bold face on life and—and——

PHILIP. [*Caressing her*]. There—there! Steady! "A bold face on life" is a very good word. Be you well? You look sadly.

HESTER. I'm all right now you're back. 'Tis only the nights was so dreadful. I've cried out for daylight to come and been frightened to sleep for dreaming.

PHILIP. This won't do. You're finger-cold and white as curds.

HESTER. How is it to be?

PHILIP. Not a word till I've got you warm again—warm and happy, both.

HESTER. I shall be all right now you're home.

PHILIP. So you will then. That's the way—smile now—just a little one. Ha, ha, that's my girl! Fetch a drop of liquor—spirits—'twill do you good so well as me. Then I'll tell what's to tell.

HESTER. Don't you go away, I can't let you out of my sight no more.

[*Exit* HESTER.

[*When she has left the room* PHILIP BLANCHARD'S forced animation dies. His face assumes a deeply troubled look. He takes off his hat and coat and warms his hands at the fire. He is staring before him lost in thought, when his wife returns with a bottle and a tumbler, and a jug of water on a tray. He pours out spirits, adds water and makes her drink. Then he

pours more spirits to what she leaves and drinks himself.

HESTER. Tell me truth—everything.

PHILIP. I be going to do it. Come here on my lap—so close as you can get.

HESTER. 'Tis heaven to see you again. I couldn't have bided a day longer without 'e. I was growing old.

[She sits on his lap and puts her arms round his neck.]

PHILIP. We ban't the sort to grow old, I reckon. We've had a good time—a brave time.

HESTER. And be going to for years and years.

PHILIP. You can't keep at high-water-mark for ever. The tide will turn. Maybe the happiest be them that don't turn with it and end on the flood.

HESTER. Tell it out—Elias?

PHILIP. What a world—eh? An old felt hat from a bramble bush—and all the devils in hell couldn't have thought on a better plan. Coaker found it by chance and put two and two together, fired by his long hate of Elias. And he got to the old boy's bones after six weeks' searching. I lay Jacob Waycott be laughing in hell if he knows about it, for the best laugh be the last.

HESTER. Don't talk that way or you'll drive me mad.

PHILIP. I'll begin at the beginning. And the beginning was afore I went to see Elias. 'Twas in my mind when I left you three days ago—a great

amazement about you, Hester. To think that you—for love—could take what I'd done so light, and never turn against me, and never——

HESTER. [*Impatiently.*] That's child's talk. We be far past that. Ban't you and me one—body and soul? Your work's my work. I'm *you*—so much as your right arm be you.

PHILIP. Ah! You wonder! and well I know it. But I wish you wasn't screwed so tight into my life—for if——

HESTER. We be one creature, I tell you—close, close as the handle to the hatchet and the rind to the apple.

PHILIP. A bitter rind to your sweet fruit. But I love to hear you say so. There—light down off my lap and let me move about and tell all.

[*Kisses her and rises. She sits on the arm of the chair and keeps her eyes steadily on his face as he walks backwards and forwards.*]

PHILIP. The lawyer's a good chap. When he understood that I was a great friend of Elias and must see him, he planned it, and got the warders out o' ear-shot, and I had very near ten minutes with him. They prison warders be kindly men. Elias have won 'em over, so they'd do anything for him they could.

HESTER. For sure.

PHILIP. I soon had it out and told him he was safe and lifted the load from his mind. 'Twas like coming back to life by a short cut for him, and you'd have thought I should hear him heave a pretty good sigh

of relief, or else swear an oath of thankfulness. But he only stared at me all in a miz-maze of wonder. I didn't waste no words after I told him 'twas I killed the old man. I said, "Life's terrible good to me and Hester, Elias, and knowing what a game hero you be, I've come to ax you to do us a mighty service, if you feel you can rise to it." "Be sure I will, if 'tis in my power," he said, "for Hester's sake if not for yours." He see'd, with his lightning-quick mind, that this was worse for you than me. And then I put it to him if he would stand the trial afore the nation. "'Tis any odds you'll be proved not guilty," I said to the man, "and then no harm be done, and we go on as before, and I'll pay you for your goodness after, if it takes me my lifetime, for 'twould mean salvation to me and my wife. But if it goes wrong, then you needn't turn a hair, for the very next minute, the truth will be out and you'll be cleared afore the world."

HESTER. He understood?

PHILIP. He understood and he rose to it. He rose to trusting me. We reckoned him weak and easy. But think—think of the pluck o' trusting me! Took my word after he knowed all the truth. There's bravery! Some might say 'twas foolhardy.

HESTER. Not Elias. He knows you. You put him at peace then?

PHILIP. I did, and he wanted for me to be at peace and—and you also. His first thought was you, Hester. "Tell her to fear nothing," he said. "Afore all things don't let her fret." He was very hopeful

that it would be all right. The torture of being locked up hadn't served him as it would have served me. Yet, when the trial happened a bit later, and I saw him again, he'd altered somehow and you could feel the thing had bitten into him. He knew himself safe, but there 'twas—you can't come through such a fire without getting scorched a bit. I'd die a thousand deaths rather than stand in a dock.

HESTER. Then the trial?

PHILIP. It began all right. A very clever chap, with a rare gift of the gab, stood for Elias and dwelt on his good character and all that. He bluffed and said 'twas a common scandal that Elias should have been arrested at all; and I believe, if us could have stopped there, the jury would have said "not guilty" and turned him free without leaving the box. But the Law have a dreadful way of grinding on and on, like a machine, till it fogs your understanding and leaves a common man with all the milk of human kindness dried up in him. The friendly feeling for Elias faded away presently.

HESTER. Don't say that.

PHILIP. It died out. The judge was against him. A cold man with a hatchet face, like a Red Indian. He didn't understand nothing about Elias and his fine nature, and he didn't care nothing neither. He just stood for the Law and hadn't any more heart in him than a thunderbolt. I was very near dancing with wrath when he was a summing up—all so deadly true outside and so deadly false inside. I could have

yelled at him and told him he was a liar. Yet all the time you felt the jury was bound to believe that frosty voice. 'Twas like a talking statue. Only the light in his eyes showed he was alive. [*He points to the newspaper.*] Them as read that speech this morning and know not Elias—they'll say, "He's a doomed man—and deserves it."

HESTER. Philip, Philip—for God's sake don't. I'm terrible feared.

PHILIP. Circumstantial evidence—'tis called. And the funny thing was Elias. Yes—if you'd looked at him, you'd have sworn 'twas all real to him and that he thought his life hung in the balance. If he'd been guilty, he couldn't have listened to the judge's words more dreadful keen. Alert and alive to every syllable. Licking his dry lips wet, again and again, and staring as if them dark eyes of his would bolt out of his head! In another man, that knew what he knew, you'd have said 'twas play acting; but not in him. He was terrified, if ever man was terrified. A great mystery that.

HESTER. No mystery. Oh, can't you see? Can't you feel it? 'Twas you being tried, not him; 'twas your life hanging on a hair, not his; 'twas you to go free or—or— He knew. Put your arms round me for God's love. Don't tramp no more. How be we going to live till 'tis known.

PHILIP. [*Standing still.*] Lord, you clever woman! I never thought of that. [*Goes to her.*] Why, of course—a tender chap like him—he was feeling it for me,

and feeling it so much as me—more—more than me! Don't fret your soul to fiddlestrings afore you're called to. Phew—'tis a beastly thing to be in the hands of your fellow-men—like he is. I won't go through that. If it's got to be, I——

HESTER. Keep off it! Don't whisper it!

PHILIP. Not I. I ban't going to take that dose, my pretty bird. There's plenty of sweeter physic than that.

HESTER. You mean——?

PHILIP. I mean nought—not yet. A thousand things may fall out. But if that falls out, then 'tis for you and me to——

HESTER. I won't think no more—I can't think no more. I'm worn out—my eyes be shutting. I only want to sleep for ever in your arms, Phil.

PHILIP. So you shall, then. And hope—hope about it. We be born to hope, you and me. This be only a dream, and we'll waken presently. I cling to life with all my seven senses—'tis such a damned fine thing. We must live “double tides,” as the sailors watch—every minute—every second!

HESTER. I've been on my knees praying to God all night for you, Phil.

PHILIP. That's to the good, for if a watchful God there be, then 'tis certain He wanted that hard old villain took off. And He chose me to do it, and put the fire in me to smite him down. I was driven to do it, weren't I? And be I going to yelp out that I've done wrong, because I've obeyed my Maker and

lifted my whip and smote a bad man, when the Lord woke a great rage in my heart? Ban't the Bible full of such things? I'd have been a coward to stand his scorpion tongue more; and I'd have been a fool to blab after. I'll go down to the shop now.

HESTER. No, no, I can't let you out of my sight no more to-day. I've got a dreadful fear——

PHILIP. That's not my Hester. You mustn't feel like that. You must feel same as I do and rise above little things. This be a big thing, and if it goes wrong, we've got to tackle it big. Us have got to say, we've had a good time and we thought there was more coming; but there wasn't. We've had it all. And 'twas full measure. We've loved more and took more joy of each other in six months than some poor creatures could have squeezed out of a lifetime. [*She puts her hands on his shoulders.*] Them precious hands! They'd keep it away if they could; but the world's up in arms now. 'Tis in a nutshell. If Elias be let free, we're all right; if he's not, we're all wrong, and there's an end of it.

HESTER. Don't say it. There's a thousand ways—I've thought of a thousand ways.

PHILIP. Not for me, my life—only one way for the likes of me. [*A knock.*] There's postmaster. I called and he promised to come along the minute 'twas flashed from London.

[HESTER *sinks into chair by the fireplace.*

PHILIP *goes to the door.*

PHILIP. [*At door.*] Buck up—tighten your chin.

Show your pluck—you'll never get a better chance to! [*He opens the door.*] Come in, Mr. Turtle, and thank you for coming.

Enter THOMAS TURTLE.

TURTLE. A regular procession of one, you might call it. The folk knew I'd got the news, and when I set forth, they streamed after me, like sheep after the shepherd.

PHILIP. Out with it, man!

TURTLE. The Law's made good in the eyes of the people.

PHILIP. And what have it come to?

TURTLE. We thought he hadn't done it, being that mild-mannered and civil-spoken; but such things lie only skin deep, and the eagle eye of the Law have seen through and through him.

PHILIP. Guilty?

TURTLE. Guilty, and the full, fearful penalty to pay.

PHILIP. Innocent as light!

TURTLE. You mustn't say that—'tis a very dangerous thing to question the Law, Blanchard, and I warn you against it. A cowardly, cruel murder—to slay an ancient man, weak in the hams and seventy-five years old. And to hide him, so that he shouldn't have Christian burial—'twas an outrage against God and man both.

PHILIP. He's to swing for it?

TURTLE. Death's the dreadful word—to be hung by the neck in Exeter gaol. Struck down with his

stolen food in his mouth and his stolen money in his pocket. And he thought he'd hoodwinked his Maker, no doubt, and laughed in his sleeve—poor fool—to think the creature cleverer than his Creator. 'Tis only the sinner finds God a puzzle, you must know. To me, for instance, His way be clear enough; and His way have been mine ever since I gave a blind man my first penny. And so right's done and we faithful ones know where to give the praise.

[Exit THOMAS TURTLE.

PHILIP. We're up against it, Hester.

[A curtain falls for a few moments to rise again on the second scene.

SCENE II: *Still the parlour of the Blanchards' cottage; the time is the hour before dawn. A candle burns low on the table and by the light of it PHILIP BLANCHARD sits writing laboriously. His coat and waistcoat are off; his collar is on the table. The right sleeve of his flannel shirt is turned up to the elbow, showing his great fore-arm. Many sheets of paper are scattered upon the table. Sleeping uneasily on the settle, by a low fire, lies HESTER BLANCHARD.*

PHILIP scratches his head, sorts the papers, then squares his elbows and writes. He stops, reflects and writes again. HESTER moves and murmurs in her sleep. He listens to her.

HESTER. Oh, Phil—you darling—always thinking of your girl! 'Tis much too fine for me. [*Laughs.*] I lay it cost a fortune!

[*PHILIP writes a few words. HESTER wakens and sits up. Her hair is down and the upper buttons of her bodice are unfastened.*

PHILIP. Sleep a bit longer. It ban't morning yet.

HESTER. Have I been asleep?

PHILIP. Like a top and little wonder. I've done my job. [*He gathers the papers together.*]

HESTER. To think I could sleep!

PHILIP. You was played out. See what a lot I've wrote. I'm a cat-handed, clumsy creature with a pen. A knife's my tool.

HESTER. This be waking to die.

PHILIP. I wish to God I'd never told you.

HESTER. Don't say that. Do 'e think I was only built to cuddle? We've been one in good and we'll be one in—this.

PHILIP. That's what I'd help if I could. But we love too close.

HESTER. Don't you feel different, now that you've cleared Elias afore all men? [*Pointing to the papers.*] Can't you see that to do this isn't to give yourself up?

PHILIP. No, by God—never.

HESTER. Then there's hope. I'll talk till Judgment Day if I can make you list to reason. This goes to lawyer [*pointing to papers*] and you disappear—where they'll never find you.

PHILIP. That's what I mean.

HESTER. 'Tis not what you mean. You mean to end it.

PHILIP. We needn't go back over that no more.

HESTER. To think I fell asleep! But I'm fresh now and full of fight again. Why end what's a good and blessed thing? Us talked about your life last night. Now we'll talk about mine.

PHILIP. Yours?

HESTER. As sure as God's in heaven. D'you think I'll live if you die? Can a body live with the heart taken out? But leave that. Be your own clever self, Phil. Why should you go out of it?

PHILIP. Where else can I go?

HESTER. The world's a big place, but there's time to get half across it. 'Tis given out you be called away on business. I'll invent a tale for master. Then, when you're safe, I give the writing to the lawyer. They can't hurt me. No wife's called to tell against her husband. And presently I steal off after you—and——

PHILIP. Know me better. To live like a hunted creature all my days! To feel there's hue and cry; to know that every strange man I meet may come to take me to—— Death's nought, but the fear of death be a thing that gets into the blood and poisons a man till his life's a living death. Do you want to watch me rotting under your eyes?

HESTER. You're not built to fear.

PHILIP. I know fear now; but not the fear of death.

'Tis what goes before—not what comes after. I've killed too many things to fear killing myself. But I won't be hunted to death. I'll go there at my own gait and by my own road. To doubt every eye that's fixed on me; to fear every door that opens; to dread every strange voice that axes for Philip Blanchard. No—no. You'd not drive me to that. I've lived a full life, thanks to you, and I'm not going to have it end in a mess. We've walked on the high road and we won't slink behind hedges. I've despised the people that live like sheep—the bleating herd of 'em—and be I to go at the mercy of the herd? They've got none. There's no more hard-hearted creature on earth than the herd when 'tis up in arms. There'll be judge and jury for me, too, like there was for Elias; and not one of the lot would be brave enough to pull the rope they'll give me—not one would rise to kill a man single-handed. But let 'em herd and they'll do it quick enough.

HESTER. Be patient. Don't get out of hand with yourself.

PHILIP. Help me then; don't hinder me. Show what a big, strong woman you be. I'm hungering to end it—quick—quick. I never was a patient man in body or soul. When a thing's to do; I fret till it's done.

[The candle goes out. Light has already begun to wax behind the blind. PHILIP walks to the window, draws up the blind and throws open the casement. A dim, clear dawn is

revealed, and there is the sound of a lark shrilling aloft.

PHILIP. The larks be in the sky. 'Tis a brave morning.

HESTER. You don't fear death, but a shadow. A shadow you fear. Who'll look for you? Who'll care?

PHILIP. The Law will care. What's nobody's business be everybody's business when a man kills a man. The framework of the earth shakes nowadays when a man kills a man, because life be growed so beastly precious in these cowardly times. The herd shivers if one of 'em drops, and turns frightened eyes to seek the tiger, and calls upon the unsleeping, un-resting Law.

HESTER. Then come back to me and forget yourself for a bit. Be I nothing? Don't I count?

PHILIP. 'Tis only you that do count. I've thought this out—to the dregs. I've left no stone unturned. Suppose I ran—there's a shadow of danger for Elias still.

HESTER. Not when they've read what you've wrote.

PHILIP. Why should they believe me? They know I'm his friend. The Law might say, "This be a trick. This man have took the blame and fled—for love of the sinner." And Elias would gain nought.

HESTER. That holds the same if you was to give yourself up.

PHILIP. True enough; but not if I do what I'm going to do. If I die, they won't hang Elias.

HESTER. D'you want to die? Me—me—think of me! Be that man or any man more than me? Ban't I first? Ban't your unborn child first? Do 'e mean us to go down to the grave too.

PHILIP. Hush—that ain't my fighting Hester.

HESTER. Oh life—our life! You can't end it—you can't cut it off?

PHILIP. Bear up, and don't make it look bigger than it is. No physic's so nasty you don't forget the taste between doses. You must live, because in honour you can't die; but I must die because in honour I can't live.

HESTER. You put your honour afore me?

PHILIP. I put your own honour and your child's honour afore you. Cheer up—here's mother coming along.

HESTER. Be there no other way?

PHILIP. Christ knows that I'd take it if there was. There's no other. There! That's the look I love to see in your eyes! That's my girl!

Enter SARAH DUNNYBRIG.

PHILIP. Morning, mother. You'm travelling abroad early this morning.

SARAH. Morning, my dears. Not a wink did I sleep. And I know you be the same.

PHILIP. Bide and have breakfast along with Hester.

SARAH. 'Twas my thought. I don't feel as if I could open the shop to-day.

PHILIP. [*Laughing.*] Shops can't shut because we be going to hang the wrong man. That minds me; I've got to kill a sheep before breakfast. [*Puts on his coat.*] I'll be back presently.

HESTER. [*Aside to PHILIP.*] You don't mean—swear afore God this ban't the end. Swear you'll come back alive to me. There's got to be "Good-bye."
[PHILIP *hesitates.*]

HESTER. Swear it, or I'll die too—that instant moment.

PHILIP. I thought may be——

HESTER. Swear it.

PHILIP. I will then. You're right. I swear to you I'll come back to say "Good-bye." You and me be strong things. A clean cut is soonest healed. We'll part clean, not ragged. [*Exit PHILIP.*]

SARAH. I ain't slept a wink for thinking on this dreadful thing. I heard voices last night. I could have sworn Elias was talking down under in the shop.

HESTER. 'Tis a very fearful come-along-of-it.

SARAH. I'll never trust a human again. Not man nor woman will I trust. If that man wasn't good, then there's no goodness in anybody. The people be running about like a nest of ants. And to think he wanted to marry you and offered to do it! And I was that fretful because you wouldn't take him, and never saw the watching Lord in it! To wed a man with red hands!

HESTER. Be you like the rest? Don't you know him?

SARAH. No, I did not. None did. He hid his

proper self as only such dark and secret men can hide themselves. He was a mask to us and behind it the real, terrible creature moved and struck—like lightning from the cloud.

HESTER. Fool's talk, mother. He never did it.

SARAH. Who did then? But thank God 'tis not in our hands. You mustn't think of him no more. He's had justice, and 'tis all the best or worst have a right to ask for. 'Tis all that men can give to saint or sinner.

HESTER. And ban't mercy in man's reach too?

SARAH. Not afore spilled blood. We must do as God bade us, and take life for life as long as the Bible lasts. Life be the most sacred thing as God ever made, and He's terrible jealous of it. He gives and He takes away; but He won't suffer none else to meddle with it. Life and death be God's work.

HESTER. Oh mother, mother, if you but knew! But you—you with your Bible thoughts—Go, now. Don't you bide to breakfast. Us would rather be all alone this morning. 'Tis hitting us cruel hard.

SARAH. And well I know it. You sit still and let me get the food and comfort you. You be cold and weary-eyed. Your face be like an old woman's in the morning light. But don't let that vex Philip. Tell him 'tis always the way when a little one be drawing on us.

HESTER. Yes, yes. He knows. He thinks nought of it.

SARAH. And don't let him be frightened if he sees a grey hair or two. My family always went grey terrible

early. I was grey afore you was born. 'Tis only a harmless trick of nature. But he mustn't fret about it.

HESTER. Not he—he never troubles for things like that.

SARAH. A proper fine man, and I love him very well, for he understands me something wonderful.

HESTER. Yes, yes—so fond of you, as if you was his own mother.

SARAH. There's such a lot to thank God for, and not a cloud without a silver lining. I was thinking last night what a lucky thing it is that Elias have got no father and mother to break their hearts and go mad for him. We thought when he was left an orphan, that it was a hard case; but little we knew what they were took from.

HESTER. For God's sake be gone, mother dear; I want to be alone.

SARAH. You're wrong. 'Tis a moment when you should have cheerful company. Till all be over and time rolling on again, you did ought to keep with friends, Hester. There may be more coming out presently. Elias will very like confess now. They often do when hope's dead, and the chaplain labouring day and night at 'em.

[Exit SARAH DUNNYBRIG.

[HESTER collects PHILIP's papers and puts them in a stamped envelope which lies on the table beside them. She moves restlessly about the room, then hears PHILIP's voice answering WILLES GAY. She looks out of

the window and leaves the room as PHILIP and GAY enter it.

GAY. She must come and see my wife, well or ill. I won't hear "no." A proper, brave creature is Hester——

PHILIP. Brave enough, but a bit under the weather for the minute.

GAY. Don't say that. You people ban't born to trouble. You deserve to be happy, and you are happy. 'Tis the very rare case of folk getting what they deserve. My Eliza finds the world a terribly difficult place since she became a wife and mother. And not the first. In a word, the baby's got a temper. He's going to be one of the fierce sort, I'm afraid. 'Tis a fatal thing nowadays to be born into the world if you're fierce, Philip.

PHILIP. So it is, then—fatal! No room for the fierce now. The race be all to the sheep, not the wolf.

GAY. Quite right too. Sheep be useful; wolves ban't. You've got to be useful to your fellow-man, else he won't be useful to you.

PHILIP. You may be useful to him and he's too big a fool to see it. The strong get no thanks—slander and envy be their portion. The world hates 'em.

GAY. The thing is to keep in with all men and take good care not to let your head rise above the level of the rest.

PHILIP. Aye, chew grass and bleat like the others, and they'll let you bide. But if you growl a bit, they'll soon band together against you.

GAY. Nobody ever heard me growl—nor my Eliza either. Live and let live be our motto, and yet—our son be born fierce! 'Tis as if the hedge-sparrow's egg had hatched out a hawk. He'll take his mother's breast more like a young tiger sucking than a baptized Christian child; and if she keeps him waiting—my stars! we hear about it.

PHILIP. The world will tame him, if you can't.

GAY. The world's full of puzzles, Blanchard, and so like as not, though you and your Hester be the brave, fearless sort, to look the sun in the eyes without blinking, your child will be meek and gentle and full of grace.

[PHILIP is moved. He holds his hand over his eyes a moment.

PHILIP. Please God, 'twill be a good little man-child—built for his mother's peace and happiness.

[Enter HESTER with a tray, on which are a tea-pot and plates, a loaf, and a piece of honey. PHILIP puts kettle on the fire.

PHILIP. There's talk of a petition already, they say.

GAY. I'll sign it for one, and so will my wife. I believe he did it in a savage moment; but I don't hold with hanging—'tis too revengeful and calls for a man-butcher. To think of a person with an immortal soul, and made in the image of God, getting his living by stringing up his fellow creatures! It oughtn't to be allowed.

PHILIP. Baa, baa! That's the way the sheep

people talk. Then why do they send men to the gallows?

HESTER. At best, if he was spared, they'd give him penal servitude for life.

GAY. That's only twenty years.

PHILIP. Twenty years! Twenty hells! Who wants to rot afore he's dead? Who'd take life at that cost when he could be free—free as death?

GAY. Ah, my son, life be life to the worst of us.

PHILIP. I know there's many would creep through any dirt just to live. But not him. He ban't so sweet on living that he'd want to suffer it in a convict's jacket.

GAY. You'm a rash chap, Philip, and I'm feared of my life your opinions will spoil your happiness some day. Well, Mrs. Blanchard, you'll guess why I'm here. Eliza's down-daunted this morning. She dreamed of a rope last night, and our hard-hearted child be on her nerves worse than usual. So may I say you'll step over?

PHILIP. She'll try to do so soon as she can. But Elias—a very great friend——

GAY. There's nought soothes the woful mind like helping other people. I'll say you be coming to forget your trouble in ours. *[Exit WILLES GAY.]*

HESTER. I can't live out of sight of you. My heart stops out of sight of you.

PHILIP. We're past all that. We're brave; we can look the sun in the face, as Gay said just now. The worst be over because we know the worst. I'm

just going up the goyle two mile off—the old roundy-poundy at Moor-edge, our first walk when we was tokened. I'm all right and cheerful you see.

HESTER. I can't fight no more for 'e.

PHILIP. Life's worse than death, sometimes. I know that your part's a mighty deal harder than mine. You're the brave one; you're the wonder. Perhaps I'd have said, "Come with me and see what 'tis like" but for—— No, no. Us can't both be murderers. 'Twould shake heaven up too much—eh, Hester?

HESTER. This is the end then?

PHILIP. No—the beginning, if what you believe holds true.

HESTER. What be you going to do?

PHILIP. Nought to name—just slip out of it easy and quick—I've got to go; but my little one have got to come. We've had a proper time—a grand time—and we didn't leave off in the midst, but at the end. 'Tis finished, full and over-flowing: always remember that. You'll stumble on peace presently and live again in the babby—and so shall I. 'Tis rough on you, but you believe in another world. So this be only "Good-bye" till to-morrow. Try to see it like that. There's a God all right. I don't deny it no more. And you'll be His care now I be gone. He won't make 'e so happy as I have—twenty Gods couldn't; but 'tis up to Him to do His Almighty best.

HESTER. Phil—Phil—my beautiful, strong Phil!

To take your own life! A forbidden thing! Think of Christ!

PHILIP. Let Him think of me. He'll do to others as He'd be done by, Hester. I don't fear Him. Good-bye till to-morrow. 'Tis only to-morrow.

HESTER. Not yet—not yet.

PHILIP. Mind about the letter. So long, my own life!

HESTER. Not yet—Do 'e grudge a little minute out of eternity?

PHILIP. For honour mind—for honour. And Elias—you tell him about it, Hester. I'll lay he'll say some comforting things—a man built to comfort sad folks.

[HESTER is now dazed and holds him by his coat as he moves about.

HESTER. For honour—for honour.

PHILIP. That's my brave girl! I'd like to go here with your arms round me—by God I would! I'd like to shut my eyes on your blessed face; but that's beyond nature.

HESTER. For honour. No—no—don't kiss me yet—just a minute more.

PHILIP. A minute! We shall have millions and millions of years together with luck—eh? [*Kisses her.*] There! Mind that kiss and keep it warm till us run up against each other again somewhere. God be good to 'e, you brave, faithful woman, for you've done nought but love a —— The angels in heaven did ought to tumble over each other to comfort 'e.

[*Laughs.*] I'll tell 'em to come, if I get the chance.
Good-bye, my dinky dear!

HESTER. Hold me close a minute more—just one minute!

PHILIP. There—there. Time's flying and he'll fly fast. Show your pluck. I mustn't be rough to 'e. 'Tis the last thing I'd—

[HESTER *clings to him and he moves her arms, gently.*

HESTER. Don't—don't—a second—a second—what's one second? I can't—I can't let 'e go—you shan't leave a woman that's loved like me—'tis cruel Phil—Phil—Oh Christ, hold him back—Oh, Jesus, spare him—spare him to me!

[*She faints and falls to the ground.*

PHILIP. Thank the Lord!

[*He puts a cushion under her head. Kisses her hand passionately and goes off.*

HESTER *slowly returns to consciousness and sits up on the floor. She stares round her. She hears the faint song of a bird.*

HESTER. The larks be in the sky and 'tis a brave morning. [A knock. Enter WILLES GAY.

GAY. Back again, like a bad penny! Excuse me—why, what's happened?

HESTER. [*Light-headed.*] The larks be in the sky and 'tis a brave morning, Mr. Gay.

GAY. So 'tis then; but where's Philip?

HESTER. Gone to work. Did he have his breakfast? I don't know.

GAY. Of course—a hungry man like him. Don't you sit there. 'Tisn't the place for you.

HESTER. I must have falled down, I reckon. There ain't no nature in me this morning. I'm cruel tired.

GAY. Let me lift you in the armchair. There. To think of you sick! 'Tis the shock about Elias!

HESTER. Your child's a proper little terror, Willes Gay; but Phil says the fighting sort make the finest men. He was that sort. He was—where is he? Where's my husband?

GAY. That's what I want to know.

HESTER. I've been dreaming. [*Rises up and sits down again.*] My legs are turned to water this morning. [*Puts her head in her hands.*] 'Tis a funny, fearful thing. Wait a minute—my brains be working again.

GAY. Us had better fetch a doctor to 'e if you're ill.

HESTER. I'm never ill. Strong as a pony and happy as a bird. But—but I was holding him tight and he said, "Show your pluck." Why for was I holding him tight?

GAY. Lord knows. You don't need to hold him, I reckon. Wild hosses wouldn't drag the man away from you.

HESTER. [*Suddenly cries out.*] He's gone! I'll never see him no more—the goyle—Reach me my sun-bonnet off that nail. He's there, because— He wanted for my arms to be round him. Why not?

Why shouldn't a woman have her arms round her husband? Don't Eliza put her arms round you?

GAY. Not now the baby's come. 'Tis a cruel shame to lift the young above the old, like she do.

[Gives HESTER her sun-bonnet.

HESTER. To show my pluck—eh? A very fine deed to close his eyes. The last thing he'd know was my lips on his. I'd go too—I wanted to go; but he bade me stay in the world all alone with nought but a child for comfort. Cold comfort—eh?

GAY. Very cold comfort, indeed, in my opinion.

HESTER. How if I died first? Would he be terrible vexed to find me waiting for him? Or terrible happy? Life ain't much fun lived all alone, Mr. Gay?

GAY. So I thought once; but there's nothing like trying it along with other people to change your views.

HESTER. He chose the goyle for remembrance—a lonesome place, full of sweet grass nibbled down by the rabbits. The plover's nest in the bog up over. I'll go to him. And if God's got the heart to blame me, He ain't no God of love.

GAY. Here—here—this talk's all moonshine! Whatever is the matter, Hester? Don't tell me such a sensible pair be out? You haven't quarrelled with the man?

HESTER. When does the soul come into a child?

GAY. Be blessed if I know. But I can tell 'e when the devil do; and that's exactly five minutes after he's born.

HESTER. The soul's a deep question. A child can't perish if the soul be in him. Do it wait for the babe to be born?

GAY. A deep question sure enough.

HESTER. I say it don't. I say that a babby's got a soul from the moment a mother knows he's there. That's when his little heart begins to beat. He's somebody then. He may be no bigger than a tiny flower-bud; but he's somebody, and his soul be hid in the petals. You can't do him no harm after that. He's the Lord's business after that. [*Going.*] Don't you understand? 'Tis only bringing up in the next world instead of this one. 'Tis only making an angel of him instead of a man. I'm going to my husband, you must know. I see all very plain now, and I be so strong as a lion again. Don't fear I'll be a coward; I won't tempt him to turn back, nor nothing like that. I'll help him—he shan't flinch; I'll push him on. I'll do it for him if he likes. He don't know me yet! 'Tis two good mile to the goyle; but I'll run like a lapwing.

Enter THOMAS TURTLE.

TURTLE. Where's Philip Blanchard to?

HESTER. We can't tell that. We don't know where he is; but we know where he will be. How far is it to heaven, postmaster? You know everything. Tell me that.

GAY. She's light-headed.

TURTLE. 'Tis enough to make the nation light-

headed. I heard it first—all comes to me first. It travelled the telegraph wires at half-past six of the clock. And knowing what these folks felt about it, I just ate my breakfast and put on my hat and came. I'm right again, Willes Gay. *[Waves a telegram.]*

GAY. Be you ever wrong?

TURTLE. No doubt I do wrong like us all; but 'tis a kind of rare and inner wrong-doing—so uncommon that 'tis hidden from all eyes—including my own. Only my Maker catches me at it, and I shall know where I made my mistakes when I go afore the throne, no doubt. Elias Waycott's the matter. He murdered his uncle, as I said. 'Tis all out now.

GAY. Confessed?

TURTLE. He has, if ever man did; but not in words. Deeds speak louder than words.

GAY. So they do, so they do. Nought teaches you that like a new-born child.

TURTLE. And he's done a dreadful deed of shame. Don't you go afore you hear the bitter truth, Mrs. Blanchard. The man's destroyed himself—Elias.

GAY. Good powers—killed hisself!

TURTLE. He has, and ended a crooked life with a crooked act.

[A great change comes over HESTER, but the men do not observe it.]

TURTLE. 'Tis funny how often I'm right, and yet not funny neither when you think where I get my news from. They say in Little Silver that I walk arm-in-arm with the Almighty; and they don't mean

it for a compliment. Yet 'tis truer than the fools know.

[HESTER *has revealed that her mind is clearing. She becomes alive and alert. Now she goes off by the same door that PHILIP went; but the men do not observe that she has gone.*

GAY. Killed himself? However did he do it? They watch 'em like a cat watches a mouse after they be sentenced to die.

TURTLE. Well you may ask that. 'Twas all of a piece, Willes Gay. The cunning of the serpent under the harmlessness of the dove. Be sure 'twas all thought out so soon as he heard his doom. You see he made great friends of the prison people before the trial, and the officers were deceived. A great power of deceit in that man. The warders thought no evil of him—they liked him and were sorry for him. And, yesterday night, when he sat writing his confessions, as murderers do, he asked a man who watched over him—quite innocent like—for a penknife to scratch out a word. And the man—he'll suffer for it and lose his job, and so he ought—he was deceived and saw nothing in the prisoner's deep question and never dreamed what he was after. A trick worthy of the devil, you might say. He took the penknife and began to scratch out, and then—afore t'other could lift a finger—swish! the dreadful wretch had dashed it in under his ear and cut a great vein as runs there! The doctor was sent for, but he

could do nought—the man was gone and his life-blood all run away.

GAY. [*Who has sat with open mouth listening to the story.*] Stars in heaven! To think of it—such a gentle creature!

TURTLE. The devil looks after his own, Butcher Gay, and for that matter, as I've often said, if he'd only look after his own and not torment the chosen, 'twould be a much more respectable world and a lot of good time saved.

GAY. To pile suicide on murder! And they was getting up a petition for his life a'ready.

TURTLE. They were. I know all about it. But man proposes and God disposes, and always have done since I can remember Him. And grim as a ghost will the Almighty look when Elias Waycott comes unbidden afore Him. You can blaze it abroad, Willes Gay, and you, Mrs. Blanchard——

[*Finds that HESTER is not there.*]

GAY. Slipped off to tell her husband, no doubt. She's queer this morning—all over the shop—her brain reeling. Horror on horror for them. I hope it won't make no difference to her child.

TURTLE. Nothing happens afore it happens. 'Tis a great thought and I've often cheered a downcast sinner with it. We come and we go, and 'tis for a man like I am, who finds life as easy as A.B.C., to help them that make such a hash of it.

GAY. No doubt—no doubt. But the day won't stand still along of these dreadful things.

TURTLE. There's room for all in a well-regulated mind. We must have good and bad ; and when you get the large outlook, like mine, all fits into its place, and you're never flustered with joy, nor stricken with sorrow ; you're never puffed up nor cast down ; but you go on your rounds, like the sun in heaven, ready for the best and worst, with your gifts always at the service of your weaker brethren.

GAY. A thousand pities there ain't more such men.

TURTLE. You mustn't say that, neither. People like me be the leaven that leavens the lump ; but you can't have the cake of life all plums, Butcher Gay.

[*Exeunt* WILLES GAY and THOMAS TURTLE.]

SCENE III: *An old, neolithic hut circle in a coombe at Dartmoor edge. Here lies a rough ring of stones piled irregularly and built together with living grass, fern and heath. Above the circle ascends a white-thorn tree, and behind it there lifts a hill to the horizon. Here stands a tor, piled raggedly, like a small mountain, against a bright, clear sky. The hour is fair and sunny. PHILIP BLANCHARD sits beside the hut circle and leans back against a stone behind him. A few moments elapse ; he lifts himself, flings off his hat and puts hand in his pocket. He listens. Faint and far off comes a voice. He listens still and the voice grows louder.*

JOHNNY SLOCOMBE. [*Off.*] Mr. Blanchard, Mr. Blanchard ! [*PHILIP stands up and walks a few paces.*

JOHNNY. [*Louder.*] Mr. Blanchard—a reprieve—there's a reprieve, Mr. Blanchard!

[*PHILIP falls back. Grows unsteady and sits again.*]

JOHNNY. [*Off.*] Where be you, Mr. Blanchard?

PHILIP. Here, by the roundy-poundy.

[*After a pause JOHNNY SLOCOMBE runs in and flings himself down panting.*]

JOHNNY. I've run all the way from the village, master—all the way without stopping. Your missis met me and give me a shilling—a whole shilling—to run and tell you there's a reprieve. And she's coming too, but of course an old woman like her can't travel so fast as me.

PHILIP. Yes; she's coming, I see her sun-bonnet down below there. Have I got a shilling, I wonder? [*Feels in his pocket.*] Nay, but I've got two. You ran for something, Johnny.

[*Gives the boy a florin.*]

JOHNNY. My stars! I be very near afraid of such a lot of money.

PHILIP. You earned it. A reprieve. Strange it came so quick. No more to tell?

JOHNNY. That's all she said.

PHILIP. I'll go down along to meet her.

[*Exit PHILIP excited and hopeful.*]

JOHNNY. [*Walks up and down still panting. Then*

he sits where PHILIP sat.] Three shilling! [*Examines the money.*] Thirty-six pennies, that is! Shan't tell father—nor yet mother.

[Exit JOHNNY slowly, thinking.]

[After a short pause PHILIP enters, terribly cast down, and HESTER, excited and panting, follows him.]

HESTER. Don't take it so.

PHILIP. 'Twas done but for the doing. You lied to me—lied to a dying man! Nay, I was a dead man out of mind, and you fetched me back to this bitter hour.

HESTER. Hear me, then. 'Twas no lie, but truth. Wasn't you reprieved? Didn't Elias send your reprieve from his grave?

PHILIP. 'Tis only another pang to death to know he's gone.

HESTER. 'Tis life, I tell you! You can't die now. God's willed it and you can't kick against God.

PHILIP. I'm my own master yet.

HESTER. You're not; you're not no more. And I've got to show you you're not. I've got to larn you that you must live. Never was such a trumpet call to a man to live as you've heard to-day. He did a glorious deed and you be powerless afore it—unless you'd fling the gift of a man's life back in his face.

PHILIP. I didn't ax for the gift and I won't take it.

Be I the sort to take gifts? I give gifts—I don't take 'em. Shall my life go on in the smell of that man's blood? No man shall give his life for mine, I tell you. To have a thing forced upon you—to——

HESTER. Don't measure it; don't weigh it! Begin to weigh and the greatest deeds that we can do are light.

PHILIP. Against a man's pride yes—everything weighs light against a man's pride. I'm proud—proud as hell. Shall I go on living among the people and let him rot, without even a stone to tell the world what he was?

HESTER. Can pride rise above the life of a friend? 'Tisn't for you to say what you will do, or won't do. 'Tis for you to bend and go on your knees. The world goes on its knees afore Christ—don't it? And this man be your very own Christ—and gave his life for yours.

PHILIP. Not for mine—not for mine! I won't take it—I'll deny him and defy him. I be going to die, too, and join him afore the day's cold and say, "There's my life back for yours!" I won't take his life. I won't smother and choke under such a fearful gift. Death's a holiday to that.

HESTER. [*After reflecting a moment and watching him as he strides up and down.*] So be it then. You owe him nought. Smart no more, for you're outside this altogether. Elias didn't mean that. He knew you too well to mean that. 'Twas only my foolish-

ness to think it. This is nothing to do with you. Be at peace—give over raging. Not for you he did it; but for me! He loved me, and I'm a woman and can take it from him, because of his dear love. I can take it—on my knees, and thank God for evermore for making such a man. And my child shall do the same, as soon as his little tongue can tell it. He loved me—so cruel well that, sooner than my light should go out, he did this. A saint of God—and saints give more than us common folk can pay again. We can only pray our blessings on them.

PHILIP. 'Tis worse than gall to be in the debt of the dead!

HESTER. Is it so hard to take from him that loved so well? He gave his goodness like the trees their fruit—gave and gave again, with never a thought for thanks.

PHILIP. Justice, I tell you. Shall I stand by and let him go down to the dust with all men's scorn and hate for his gravestone? His good name be in our care now, and I'm crying out to shout it to the people.

HESTER. The people! What are the people? God Almighty's gotten his prize for him. 'Tis there, not here. If you tell the people this thing, then he died in vain. You call for justice—then be just to him. All cowardice would it be to die now and flout the wish of the dead.

PHILIP. His memory shall be pure.

HESTER. It is for ever ; for it lies in God's keeping ; and when the books be opened all men will know what he was. But here—for the minute—for our little minute together—you and me—we must—for justice—for justice to him and the mighty thing he did and the reason he did it——

PHILIP. You're selfish to speak so. 'Tis no temptation what you offer me.

HESTER. I ban't trying to tempt you, Phil. If you can say that, 'tis you be selfish. You're not thinking of him no more—you're thinking of yourself now—yourself and your own peace. My Philip ain't brave no more—he's a coward now. If my love hungers dreadful to save you alive—be that strange ? But I'm not putting my love afore you—I'm only putting his love afore both of us. [*Caressing him.*] Believe that, for God's sake, whether you live or die.

[*PHILIP puts her away.*]

HESTER. For him—for him, so that his greatness and loving-kindness be not all flung in the dust. Don't he speak to us in this as never man spoke to men ? And shan't we listen ? I'd have raised Heaven to prevent it—but him and his God was stronger than you and me. Don't you tell me I'm a selfish woman. Try to think what 'tis to give up all—all—and then to have all given back to you. Phil—Phil—didn't I say 'good-bye' to 'e ? Didn't I lose 'e ? Wasn't you dead ? Be I to lose you twice ? 'Tis more than you can ax a poor woman to do that. Don't rob me of my precious gift—don't flout the

giver. With his own hand he gave you back to me. *[She weeps.*

PHILIP. D'you want me to live in hell?

HESTER. Better that than spoil his heaven. Live in hell then—and I'll live there along with you. You be called to suffer—then suffer—let it be your bravery to suffer—let that be your pride—to suffer as no man has suffered yet! Bend under the yoke for his sake. You'd rather die than live; but you can't die now—you can't turn his joy into grief. The pain of death was over for you. You'd done the hard part—you'd left me. May be you've suffered enough already. And Elias—the prayer of such a man will count—eh, Phil? He'll call on God for us—so that there shall be a little bleak sunshine for our child when he comes.

PHILIP. You can think o' that? And me twice a murderer now. 'Tis almost more than a man built like me can do——

HESTER. God'll larn you how. He'll make the hard possible—for the sake of Elias.

PHILIP. Nothing can ever be the same again. You can never be the same again. I can never wake up no more and watch you asleep beside me like I did. My child won't be nothing but a pang to me now. Everything be turned black as night and hell, look where I will.

HESTER. Shadows pass—shadows pass, I tell you—they can't hang still for all time. Never a thunder cloud but its darkness goes by.

PHILIP. Not till the bolt has fallen.

HESTER. It has done—and missed you.

PHILIP. Because another have took the lightning to his heart for pity. Curse pity—curse his pity. It have turned my life into death.

HESTER. Don't say it. None be so strong he can stand alone. Don't all men suffer from their fellows, or gain from them? Be true to him that was so true to me. Be loyal to him that was so loyal to me. Think of me a little too. Don't put no more on a poor, daft woman. And yet I'll bear and bear until I break for you, Phil. I'll suffer more yet. Fire and water I'll fight for you—time's self I'll fight and make it fly.

PHILIP. Time was over. I'd bid good-bye to time. I'd sat aloft here and thought of the old men who lived in these here stones, and roamed my eyes round the world and the village and took leave of everything.

HESTER. Not everything. You didn't know everything. There's no righting wrong in the grave; there's no making good there. You can't creep in the pit now with all your work to do. For him to go was different—one life for three he gave. For you to go—you've got to live with me—with me beside you always. That's what he willed—that's what he died for. And my poor hands be here—always here for you to take hold on—and my poor heart's beating only for you. Don't break it. [*Her voice grows faint and she shows weakness. She holds out her hands to him, but*

he does not move.] For your Hester—for love of your Hester. [*She kneels to him, then she throws herself at his feet and puts her head upon them and her arms round his legs.*] Live—live—live!

[*PHILIP looks down at her. Then he takes a pistol from his pocket. He unloads it and flings it on the ground. He bends down and strokes her hair.*

PHILIP. I be going to go on living, Hester.

[THE END]

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